Mindfulness

Andrea Fella · Notable Dhamma Teachers — Andrea Fella · 53:14

When the Buddha taught, he emphasized certain qualities repeatedly, particular qualities that he really indicated were important if you want to practice and understand his teachings. Energy and mindfulness were two qualities he highlighted as very helpful to cultivate. Tonight I'd like to talk about mindfulness.

First, I'd like to explore definitions of mindfulness—what we think of as mindfulness. I think the simplest way we often think about it is just this sense of being present, this quality of presence. Another way we often think about mindfulness is as a witnessing of our experience, where somehow there's a distance between what we're experiencing and this witness. That's often how we conceive of mindfulness, that this witness is an aspect of it.

One definition I like to use as a working definition is that mindfulness can be thought of as knowing what is happening while it is happening. There are two pieces to this: the knowing quality, knowing what's happening, and then the awareness that you know it while it's happening.

I'm sure many of you have had the experience of sitting in a room reading a book or doing something, and you're focused on what you're doing—that's mostly what you're aware of, the reading of the book. But somebody comes in the room and walks out, and there's a vague awareness of that. If somebody comes up to you later and asks, "Have you seen so-and-so?" you might think, "Oh, yes, I think they came in while I was reading the book." But there wasn't that clear knowing of that experience while it was happening. That's not the kind of awareness we're talking about. We're talking about a clear knowing of what's happening at the moment it is happening.

The Pali word for mindfulness is sati, spelled S-A-T-I, and the root of that word is related to the sense of memory, of remembering. One of my teachers says mindfulness is about remembering—just remembering what's happening, remembering yourself. That's actually a way we can explore it. My teacher Sayadaw U Tejaniya says if you're struggling to be mindful, just remember yourself. Think about yourself. What am I doing right now? That can be a way into the exploration of mindfulness.

One of the preeminent Buddhist scholars of today, Bhikkhu Anālayo, has written a lovely book on mindfulness and the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, which is the Buddha's discourse on the four foundations of mindfulness—the Buddha's description of how to practice mindfulness meditation. It's a central discourse in the Buddha's teaching. In that book, Anālayo looks at this definition of remembering and offers the explanation that the quality or factor of mindfulness is a factor of mind that allows memory to function.

I played with that one day. After I read the definition, I spent the next day exploring it. What is the state of

mind, what is the quality of mind that can remember? It's a state in which you are present and alert and aware while things are happening. That's another way to explore this quality of mindfulness: the factor that allows memory to function.

Now, this doesn't necessarily mean—I think there's a difference between a factor of mind that allows memory to function and memories actually being recorded and kept in our mind. Sayadaw U Tejaniya says that initially, when we start to practice mindfulness, if we think of mindfulness as being connected with having a good memory, what seems to happen is that as we move into the present moment, paying attention to the present moment, we seem to forget things a lot. It's like we don't remember what's happened to us.

His explanation is that typically the way our memory works is that we repeat things to ourselves over and over again. I think there's some truth to this—that when we want to remember something, we make an effort to remember it. What happens when we're paying attention right in the present moment is that we're not making that effort to repeat things to ourselves, and so that way of getting things into memory goes away. But then he said that when the quality of mindfulness is very high, when the mindfulness is extremely clear and very strong, then you will remember things.

And I have had that experience. There have been times where the mindfulness was just so clear. It was during times when I was particularly paying attention to my experience and something very clear unfolded. It's just seared in my mind—that experience is just seared in my mind because the mindfulness was so strong. So we can think of there being a connection between mindfulness and memory.

Another way I like to contemplate or explore this quality of mindfulness is to think about it as a reflective capacity of mind, a capacity that reflects what's happening in the moment. We have this capacity of mind that can know itself, essentially. This is part of the quality of mindfulness—it can reflect what's happening not only in the world but in our experience itself, in our mind itself. We can be mindful of being mindful. We can be aware of how our mind is working.

In this way, I like to think about mindfulness as being like a mirror. It just reflects what's happening in our experience. There are always things going on in our experience. There's always a kind of awareness happening, always a quality of knowing happening in our experience, but mindfulness is not always happening. When mindfulness is happening, it is simply reflecting everything else that's happening in our mind and body. It's a very simple kind of self-reflective process in the mind. In a sense, it's what makes us human—although they do say that some other animals have this self-reflective quality or capacity. But it is a capacity that we have as human beings, this ability to know ourselves, essentially.

This quality of mindfulness is an ordinary quality in our minds. It's something that we come with, something that we're born with. We all have this capacity, and moments of mindfulness come up for us whether or not we even know what it is. At times through the day it just spontaneously comes into appearance. But what we typically do with that moment—we don't usually notice the fact that

mindfulness has appeared for us.

The way we've been trained, the way our minds usually work, is that when we become aware of something in the moment, we usually kind of leap onto it, start thinking about it, and doing things with it. For instance, we might notice something and then start relating it to who am I and what do I need to do about that? We don't actually notice so much the fact that we have been aware of something. It immediately moves into: How does it relate to me? What do I need to do about it? So we'll often take some action out of this. We notice something and then we take some action.

For instance, you're walking through San Geronimo Lodge and you notice a big spider on the wall. You might be aware of that, but often what happens with something like that is: Oh, spider, I need to do something about that. Maybe I'll get a cup and capture it and take it outside. We move from knowing to action without recognizing the fact that we have known something, without recognizing that there's been a little tiny moment of mindfulness there.

So this quality of mindfulness actually happens to us a lot, spontaneously through the day. It comes up frequently, but we don't actually notice it because of our habitual pattern of doing something with what we have noticed. We don't really stop or recognize, "Oh, there's been some mindfulness, there's been a moment of recognizing this thing." We may not even recognize the thing clearly; we may not even really be that clear that we've recognized something because we're moving into the action of what to do about it immediately. So not only are we not really registering the initial experience clearly in our minds, but we are not recognizing that there has been a split second of mindfulness.

We need mindfulness. This quality of mind—I don't think we could live without it. If we continually lived in a state of fantasy, we'd be bumping into things all day. We need this quality of mindfulness to help us get through our day, but we just don't recognize it as something that comes for us. We don't experience the mindfulness consciously. It's kind of under the radar for us.

I think it is part of the brilliance of the Buddha to have recognized this quality, this ordinary quality of mind that just happens for all of us, and for him to say, "Wow, this is actually a really interesting quality. I think it would be helpful to pay attention to this." I think this was brilliant—for him to highlight this as a very skillful quality worth cultivating, worth paying attention to.

And that kind of mindfulness may not really be enough. Even if we start to notice it, it may not really be enough to lead us to the kind of wisdom and understanding that the Buddha had, to the freedom from the way that we suffer, the way that we struggle.

He pointed to this quality of mindfulness as being essential in the movement to freedom from our reactivity, our struggles, our suffering. But this simple ordinary quality of mindfulness may not be quite enough. Sayadaw U Tejaniya says—one of the names of one of his books is called *Awareness Alone is Not Enough*. And he often uses the word awareness to be synonymous with mindfulness. So when he says

awareness alone is not enough, or mindfulness alone is not enough, what he's pointing to is that the Buddha also brought mindfulness together with wisdom.

So what is wisdom? We often have this term, and wisdom has a kind of grandiose sound to it. We think, "Well, if I have to have wisdom to be mindful, there's little hope because I don't know how much wisdom I have." But the Buddha pointed to some very specific kinds of wisdom, and some of them are pretty straightforward. He's just pointing to what's helpful. Orienting our attention in this direction is helpful.

So bringing mindfulness—and in a sense this is another way that the remembering comes into play—he says it's helpful to remember to be aware of certain things. In particular, he pointed to, in a kind of simple way, that there are certain things in our mind that will lead us to suffering: the quality of greed, the quality of aversion, the quality of delusion. If we're engaged in acting out of those intentions, those motivations, we're going to head toward suffering. If we connect to non-greed, non-aversion, non-delusion—kindness, compassion, and wisdom—if we connect to those qualities instead, then we head away from suffering.

And so he pointed to this: part of the wisdom is understanding what is skillful and what is unskillful in our experience. What is unskillful is what leads us to suffering, leads us to struggle, leads us to distress. And he pointed to these qualities of greed, aversion, and delusion as being the root causes for that struggling. What leads us away from that? Non-greed, non-aversion, non-delusion.

So this wisdom that supports mindfulness, he called wise attention. And it's related to the Four Noble Truths, really. It's related to seeing in our experience what is suffering, beginning to recognize in our experience where we struggle, how this suffering comes to be. That's the First and Second Noble Truths: understanding suffering and recognizing and letting go of the cause of suffering.

So we explore our experience through this kind of framework, essentially. "Oh, there's suffering. Can I understand this suffering? What's the cause of that suffering? And what leads me away from suffering?" This is the Third Noble Truth: the possibility of freedom from suffering. And what supports that? What supports moving away from suffering? The Fourth Noble Truth: the path leading to the cessation of suffering.

So there are really two key elements if we think about how wise attention is framed in terms of the Four Noble Truths. That's one of the main ways he talked about it—that one who attends wisely understands, "This is suffering." One who attends wisely understands, "This is the cause of suffering." So he's pointing us into the present moment here. He's pointing us to attending wisely in the moment to our experience through this framework of the Four Noble Truths.

And when I look at that, I see kind of two key elements to this wise attention. One has to do with understanding suffering, beginning to see in our own experience what suffering is, recognizing it. And the other has to do with beginning to understand and explore the cause and effect relationship in experience.

How does suffering come to be? How does it end? How does happiness come to be? What supports that?

So it's not just understanding suffering, but the understanding of suffering leads us to seeing the causes and conditions, the things that create suffering. And as the mind sees that, as mindfulness witnesses the causes of suffering—one of the key pieces is that, as I said last night, one of the deepest causes of suffering is this wanting things to be other than they are. It is the wanting, it's in our own minds, that this suffering is produced.

This is actually good news.

It might not sound like good news that suffering is created by our own minds. But if suffering were created out there, and we had no input into it, it would be hopeless. As it is, the ways that we struggle, the reasons that we struggle, have to do with things that are happening in our own minds. And we can change the course of our minds by bringing this wise attention.

So that's one of the aspects of wisdom that supports mindfulness—or that makes mindfulness actually a liberating quality of mind, one that really supports us to move towards freedom from suffering, freedom from distress, freedom from struggle, freedom from dissatisfaction. *Dukkha*, the Pali term, freedom from *d ukkha*. *Dukkha* is often translated as suffering, but it's a subtler term than that. It really has a very broad range of meanings.

I like to think about the etymology of that word as well. My understanding is that there are two parts to the word: the *du* part and the *kha* part. The *du* part means bad. And the *kha* part, my understanding is that it refers to the empty space in the middle of a wheel. So if you think about what it means to have an empty space in the middle of a wheel that's bad—there are many ways that could be. It might be off-center, so the ride you'd have would be just a little rough and uneven. Or perhaps that space is a little too tight, so the axle grips and it's not a smooth ride, it's a tight ride. Or maybe it's too loose, so it's kind of wobbly. Or maybe it's really loose, so that the wheel falls off and you crash altogether.

This term *dukkha* really covers a broad range of suffering, from the subtlest kind of unease to the grossest kind of suffering. And this path that the Buddha is offering, this tool of mindfulness paired with wisdom, leads us to freedom from this *dukkha*—the *dukkha* that is created through our mind not being willing to meet things as they are, but always wanting to adjust and fix and change.

So that's one aspect of the wisdom that supports mindfulness being a factor that really helps us to free ourselves from *dukkha*. Another aspect, perhaps a different way of framing it, is noticing how we're paying attention. I mentioned this morning in the guided meditation that how we pay attention is as important, if not more important, than what we are actually paying attention to.

We begin to recognize—and this is another one of the amazing capacities of our mind—that as we're paying attention to something, we can see the thing we're paying attention to, and we can also notice that we're paying attention. For instance, a pain in the knee, or an itch on the nose, or the sound of a dog

barking in the distance. We can notice the qualities and texture of those experiences. That's part of what mindfulness does—it notices the qualities of experience. We'll talk more about this in the days to come, these different textures of experience.

So mindfulness can notice the qualities of the experience itself, but it can also turn and notice how it is noticing. The pain in the knee—you're noticing the pain, you're noticing burning, stabbing, aching, pulling, twisting, pressure. You may or may not be noticing an aversion in the mind with which you are paying attention. It may not be aversion; I'm just bringing that up because often when we're experiencing pain, there is a sense of not liking, of pushing away, that is also present in our experience.

If we are not noticing that, if we are observing that pain in the knee with this attitude of aversion, this hatred, this "I want to get rid of this, I want to fix this, I want to change it"—what we're doing is cultivating that aversion. So it's really important to begin to turn towards and recognize how we're paying attention to experience.

It's as if almost all the time we're seeing our experience through some kind of filter, some kind of lens. We've got the red lenses on or the blue lenses on. We've got the "I hate this" lens on, or we've got the "I want more of this" lens on. And if we don't notice that, then we're essentially reinforcing that filter. We're practicing that filter.

If you've got these red lenses on, one way to explore this is: can we begin to recognize, "Oh, I'm looking through red lenses"? If you wear them for a long time, you stop noticing the redness of things. So if you can begin to recognize that there is a tinge here, a tinge of something in this experience, you can start to recognize that you're looking through this filter. You can start to recognize that there's this quality of aversion in the mind that is part of this experience.

That is the first step towards moving to a more balanced attitude in the mind, a more balanced way of paying attention. From there, we may actually be able to take that lens or filter off and look at it, so that we're not looking through it anymore, but recognizing, "Oh, that's what aversion is like." We'll talk more in the coming days about how to turn and pay attention to the qualities in our mind—how to pay attention to aversion, how to pay attention to greed, how to pay attention to frustration and irritation.

For now, we can simply recognize: okay, I'm paying attention to that pain in my knee, and I don't like it.

Recognize that. The very recognition of it helps to create a little bit of balance in the mind. If we can recognize, "Oh yeah, not liking—that's what's happening," we can be aware of not liking with a more balanced attention, a balanced kind of mind.

Now, these things can have many layers to them. This is something that we begin to unravel through this exploration—the layers of our holding. We see, "Oh yeah, I don't like that. Okay, there's that aversion." Or "I hate that," and we start to recognize, "Okay, there's that hating. That's what's happening." And then we begin to see, "Oh, there's actually fear here. I see. There's some fear going on." Through this exploration

we begin to uncover layer after layer of ways that we're holding and reacting.

So we're beginning to have a recognition of how we're paying attention. This morning I was encouraging bringing as much of a sense of friendliness and kindness to your attention as you can. That will support a letting go of any pushing away or resisting of experience. But if you can't bring a sense of friendliness and kindness, see if you can at least recognize, "Yeah, I don't like this." Just see if you can frame it in your mind with even that kind of relaxed quality to the recognition. "Yeah, I don't like this. That's what's happening."

In my own experience and exploration, the wisdom of the Buddhist teaching is really, really rich. It's really dense—the littlest tiny piece of it goes a long way. You don't have to understand the entirety of the Buddhist teachings to begin to practice and begin to experience benefits from the teaching. A little bit of this wisdom paired with a willingness to explore experience can be very freeing.

In my own experience, in the first few months of my practice, my friend Chris sent me a book that encouraged me—well, I read this book and I didn't understand much of it. One thing I got out of it, though, was: when you're experiencing a strong emotion, see if you can just notice that emotion as opposed to acting on it. This is a little bit of the Buddha's wisdom—instead of acting on your emotions, see if you can observe them.

I began practicing with that. I thought, "I don't know how this is going to help." But through the exploration of just that one little bit, I could connect with that teaching and bring mindfulness to my emotions. Some very deep unraveling happened in the first few months of my experience around some of my more difficult emotions. That was a very small bit of the wisdom, yet it led to very powerful openings, very deep seeing of how the mind was creating experience and recognizing, "Oh, I don't have to go there." Very, very powerful.

So as we explore our experience, we could call this pairing of mindfulness and wisdom *right mindfulness* —the mindfulness of the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path is this fourth noble truth, a set of practices that support our understanding of our minds, leading us towards happiness. Right mindfulness is one of the components of the Eightfold Path, and really this pairing of the quality of mindfulness with wisdom is what makes it *right* mindfulness.

This moves us in the direction of recognizing just what's happening in the moment without judgment, without reactivity, without an agenda that things have to be different—just the noticing of experience moment to moment. That's what right mindfulness moves us towards. It's a kind of attention that doesn't interfere with experience. It just recognizes what's happening. It's that mirror. A mirror simply reflects experience. A mirror doesn't care what the experience is; it just reflects it. It might be reflecting a beautiful landscape or it might be reflecting a decaying corpse. The mirror is unchanged by what it reflects.

In a similar way, mindfulness is unchanged by what it is experiencing. It is just knowing it, recognizing it.

So why is right mindfulness helpful? Why is it helpful to have this quality that can just meet experience without judgment, without reactivity, just knowing what's happening in the moment without a personal agenda?

The non-reactive mind can look at reactivity. It sounds like a paradox. How can it be possible that if our minds are reacting, we can be mindful of that and not be increasing or encouraging that reactivity?

This is what I didn't understand about that instruction when I first read it. Pay attention to your emotions instead of acting on them? I thought, well, if I pay attention to my anger, isn't it just going to make the anger worse? That's what I assumed. But I decided I would try it and see what happens.

There's something about the way that mindfulness functions. The neurological studies around this show that when the mind begins to recognize or acknowledge—even using this mental labeling that we talked about—when you use mental labeling around difficulty or reactivity, something shifts. Reactivity is often happening in the core part of the brain, what they call the limbic system, the old part of the brain, the one that has to react to experience immediately. And the mindfulness is happening in the newer part of the brain. So what's occurring is that we're engaging a different part of the brain with mindfulness. The looping quality of reactivity that reinforces itself is happening at that lower level. When we bring in this newer part of the brain, it breaks the cycle a little bit.

That's what I found in my own experience. I remember the first time I woke up to a difficult emotion. I had vowed to myself that I was going to pay attention when I got really angry. And I woke up in the midst of a rage, just like, "Oh, yeah, I said I was going to pay attention to this. How do I do that?" I had no idea. I'd had very little training—I had read this book, that was it. I thought, "Well, I see I'm angry. Okay, I guess I go back to work."

In retrospect, what I see is that in that first time when I woke up in that rage, I was frozen, unable to do anything but loop in that reactivity. And the very recognition—"Oh yeah, I'm angry, I said I was going to pay attention to that"—broke into that cycle enough that I could let it go enough to even go back to work. Because I hadn't been functional. That's actually one of the reasons why I brought mindfulness into my life—my emotions were making me non-functional.

So mindfulness can observe our reactivity, and bringing in a different aspect of our mind can begin to support an unwinding of that reactivity through not reacting further. When we break in with mindfulness to our reactivity, it can stop it at whatever level it has reached. Then slowly, over time—and it took months for me to unwind these difficult emotions I was having when I started my practice—they did unwind through this practice. Very powerful.

This is one of the main reasons that right mindfulness is helpful. It really helps us see our reactivity, and it helps to unwind it so that we're not at the mercy of our reactivity. We can respond rather than react.

We also can begin to notice with mindfulness when we're starting to go down a direction that's going to

lead us into unfortunate consequences. Speech is a good example of this. We can begin to recognize, "Oh, I'm about ready to say something that maybe I don't want to say." So right mindfulness can begin to reveal when we're getting ready to take an action. This is a very powerful exploration—we can actually begin to see that we are intending to do something before it happens. We're about to do something, and mindfulness can see that.

In seeing that we're about to do something, we usually can see why we're going to do it. And in seeing why, we can have a sense—sometimes just at a gut level—"Hmm, don't know if I want to go there." Or, "No, this feels okay. I can do this." This mindfulness of intention can help us choose skillfully, to act out of wholesome intentions instead of reacting out of greed, aversion, and delusion, as we do when we are not mindful.

Right mindfulness also helps to create the conditions for deeper insight. What I've been talking about so far is more at the level of living life more skillfully, being more wholesome in our activities and letting go of the ways that we react to things. But it also begins to create the conditions for us to see deeply into the truth of reality.

Without filters, if we come to a place in mindfulness where we have seen through some of those filters and we're actually seeing clearly—without a filter of greed, a filter of aversion, or a filter of delusion—that mind, that kind of mindfulness, deeply understands and recognizes that everything happening is impermanent. It's just an unceasing, unending, impermanent flow of experience. And it recognizes, in seeing how unceasingly impermanent everything is, that it doesn't make any sense to try to hold on to anything in that flow, because it's all just like sand slipping through your fingers. There's no way to hold water. If somebody pours water into your hand, there's no way to hold on to it. And the mind recognizes very deeply that there's no way to hold on to experience—and that there's really no one here to hold on to it.

So these insights are the insights that really liberate us. These are the insights that deeply undercut our habit of holding on to things, of wanting things to be other than they are.

One of the things I'd like to explore in the last few minutes of this talk is a particular way of cultivating mindfulness. When we practice mindfulness in the early days of retreat, we're often encouraging you to cultivate it by paying attention to the objects of experience. You pay attention to the breathing. You notice the thinking. Over the days, we'll encourage you to explore more in the body and emotions. We cultivate mindfulness by being aware of these experiences as they're happening.

At the same time, we're also encouraging you to recognize the mindfulness itself. The main way we're encouraging this at this point is by inviting you to really notice when your mindfulness comes back. The moment when you remember that you have not been mindful—as I said this morning—that moment, you're already mindful as soon as you know that. Mindfulness has already returned. If you're not mindful, you're not mindful. There's nothing you can do about it. There's no way you can make mindfulness

happen. It has to come back in that spontaneous way. And then, because mindfulness has returned, we have an avenue toward making choices. What do I do with this mindfulness?

But one of the things that's really helpful in that moment is simply to begin recognizing: what's the difference between being lost and being aware? Now, we can't really know the lost feeling in the moment of being lost. But in the moment of coming back into mindfulness, there's a lingering memory of what it was like to be lost. So we can, in that moment, get a sense of contrast in the mind. What's it like now to have that awareness back? What was it like a moment ago to be kind of lost in that fog?

This exploration was actually really productive for me, partly because it helped me let go of judging myself when mindfulness came back. If my mind wandered a hundred times in a forty-minute sitting, it gave me a hundred opportunities to explore this question: What is the difference between the mind being lost and the mind being present? It gave me a hundred opportunities to recognize mindfulness returning, that moment of spontaneous mindfulness returning. It's a really amazing moment. It happens effortlessly. You didn't do it. There it is. You're back.

This gives you a pointer to a possibility—initially, a kind of ease with mindfulness. Because the mindfulness that comes back spontaneously, if we can connect with that as it returns, is a pure, easy mindfulness. It takes no effort whatsoever. Just here we are. Connecting with that gives you a feeling, a flavor for what this mindfulness feels like.

One of the benefits of this exploration was that it really helped cut the judging—for me at least—around my mind wandering, because it became simply another opportunity to see: What is mindfulness? What does it feel like to be mindful?

As the mind gets more familiar with what it feels like to be mindful, those little moments I talked about at the beginning—the little moments of mindfulness that come back spontaneously throughout your whole day, which we don't usually notice—because we have now become familiar with this feeling of mindfulness, those little moments begin to point themselves out to us. We see them happening all the time: little blips of awareness through our day.

This feeling of mindfulness is actually a familiar feeling to us. Once we start recognizing it, paying attention to it, we see it's actually quite familiar. It's just that we haven't bothered to notice it before. It's kind of like the air we breathe. We don't really notice the air we're breathing very much. It's just so obvious.

It's so present all the time. And in some similar way, those moments, those little blips of mindfulness, happen to us so frequently, yet we simply don't pay attention to them. We don't recognize them. But when we start to attend to that feeling, we see—oh yes, I know what this is. I know what this is about.

So in that moment when you remember about mindfulness, just see if you can incline towards recognizing: mindfulness has returned. And then simply—especially in informal times, as I mentioned just

before lunch—just notice what's obvious. See if you can connect with what is already happening. Wake up to what's already going on in your experience.

Continuity is a crucial piece of this. For mindfulness, for this right mindfulness to become a factor that really supports freedom, liberation, awakening, enlightenment—continuity of the mindfulness brings a deepening of the concentration. Continuity of the mindfulness itself will bring the quality of concentration along with it. We don't actually have to pay attention to one thing for the mind to settle down. While that's supportive, definitely supportive, it's actually the continuity of the mindfulness that brings the concentration.

This practice around continuity does not have to involve a heavy hand. In fact, just the opposite. I think it's really helpful to have a light touch around this mindfulness, around this trying to maintain moment after moment of noticing. There's no need to try to be more mindful in a moment. That's kind of what we attempt to do—oh, mindful! Oh yes, mindful! Let me try to be really mindful right now. That is just over-efforting, actually.

What's important, rather, is to just see if we can touch that lightly, moment after moment. Just moment after moment, meeting experience. That will create a momentum, and then mindfulness and concentration will carry together.

There's a little analogy I like to use about this. Initially, when we're cultivating this kind of continuity of mindfulness, this frequency of mindfulness, we have to encourage our mind to remember it a lot. It's kind of like those scooters that kids ride—little wheels, a little flatbed, and you stand with one foot on the rail and then tap the ground to get yourself going. When you first start on the scooter, you have to tap the ground a lot. Now, tapping down hard doesn't do much good. You could, but it's not that beneficial. It's just the light tap, tap, tap. It's the frequency that gets you going. And then once you're moving, you can tap less frequently.

It's similar with mindfulness. Initially, we have to remind ourselves frequently—oh, just this moment, just this moment. And it is just that light. How much effort does it take for you to be mindful right now of the sensation of your hands? The sensations of your buttocks on the chair or cushion or bench? The sensations of your lips touching? How much? It doesn't take much effort.

What is hard is to keep remembering—and this is again another aspect of this remembering—it's hard to keep remembering to do it. So this is where some of the effort has to come in. Just moment after moment: this moment, and this moment, and this moment.

And that continuity—this moment, this moment, this moment—will be like the momentum of that scooter. It will carry us, develop the concentration, and allow the mind to deeply see into the patterns of reactivity, see where the choices are, help us to make skillful choices, and to see deeply into the nature of experience. This leads us to the insights into impermanence, into dukkha, this dissatisfactoriness, this

unsatisfactoriness, and this ephemerality—that there isn't anyone here experiencing or doing. It's just a process. It's really a flow, a process.

So let's just sit for a moment.

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